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Would beltway pollute valleys?

Study: Toxic air will increase children's risk of cancers, asthma

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com
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A study commissioned by a citizens group opposed to the proposed Knoxville Parkway contends that vehicular pollution will settle in the valleys, exposing children to increased risks of cancers and asthma.

An attorney for Citizens Against the Beltway Orange Location said Friday that he forwarded the 22-page report to Gov. Phil Bredesen. Attorney David A. Burkhalter II said he hopes Bredesen will order the Tennessee Department of Transportation to find a less-toxic route for the road.

"We ask you as governor to exercise your executive authority to stop TDOT from making a colossal blunder that will unnecessarily expose children and the public to harm if this road is constructed," Burkhalter wrote.

"In short, TDOT has selected a very dangerous location for this parkway, and we ask for your help."

CABOL is a grassroots organization created in 1997 to oppose the 28-mile parkway through Hardin Valley. The group favored a more westerly route around Oak Ridge.

Burkhalter said CABOL has about 300 members, "not including children," committed to convincing TDOT it made an error proposing the Orange Route. Burkhalter said his house is about 600 yards from the proposed parkway, which would be designated state Route 475 if built.

TDOT said the parkway is needed to alleviate the commingled traffic of Interstates 40 and 75 through downtown Knoxville. Up to 165,000 vehicles a day travel on the interstates at Papermill Drive, where they share the same highway.

The parkway would connect Interstate 75 in Loudon County to I-75 in Anderson County near Wolf Valley Road. That bypass, TDOT contends, would remove mainly tractor-trailer rigs from the downtown area.

Burkhalter said CABOL hired Timothy Quarles, owner of Quarles Environmental LLC in Billings, Mont., to analyze the potential air quality problems involving the parkway. Burkhalter said the study took about three months. He declined to reveal how much CABOL paid Quarles.

Quarles notes that the parkway would traverse Hardin Valley, Bull Run Valley, Raccoon Valley and Wolf Valley. Each of those valleys, he said, offers a chance to collect and trap pollutants dangerous to residents, especially children. The study notes that pollutants would endanger the more than 11,000 students of the four public schools and colleges along the route.

With few prevailing winds to sweep the emissions from those valleys, Quarles said, "those living along the proposed Orange Route can expect to see a rise in the incidences of asthma."

Quarles cites national studies that prove links between vehicular emissions, especially diesel engines that power trucks, and various cancers. Those diseases include leukemia, lung cancer and nasal tumors.

Burkhalter said those studies should sound warning bells to parents who will be sending their children to the new Hardin Valley High School near the proposed parkway.

"I don't think anyone would want to send their children there considering the increased risk for cancer, leukemia and asthma," the attorney said.

Quarles recommended TDOT engage in "a detailed human health-risk study to be conducted to fully understand the potential impacts to human health associated" with any route selected for the parkway.

TDOT spokesman Travis Brickey said Friday that the federally mandated environmental impact study planned for next spring should address those concerns.

Brickey said state officials haven't seen Quarles' study, so they can't comment on it. But Brickey said the environmental impact study will examine the parkway's potential harm to air and water quality along the route.

State officials said construction on the \$570 million, four-lane, divided highway wouldn't begin for three years. Right-of-way acquisition could start in 2008 for the road that is estimated to take 15-20 years to build.

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